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ABSTRACT

This is the executive summary of a study of a year-round school (YRS) program conducted for the office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation of the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. The three basic objectives of the study were to assess the economic, educational, and social impacts of the YRS program. The program was implemented in one junior high school and its four feeder elementary schools in the Pajaro Valley Unified School District of California. The report concludes that the program is an unqualified success. The program accomplished its primary goal of alleviating overcrowding in the classrooms and eliminating double sessions while not increasing the cost of education. In fact, the cost went down. At the same time, the program has not adversely affected the educational gains of its participating students. Moreover, the program is now well accepted by parents, teachers, and the community-at-large. (Author/IRT)

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A STUDY OF YEAR-ROUND SCHOOLS

Executive Summary

November 1978

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A STUDY OF YEAR-ROUND SCHOOLS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

For the past 50 years, the standard school year in the United States has been 9 months long, generally beginning around Labor Day and continuing until early June. During these 9 months most schools are required by state law to be open approximately 180 days. During the three summer months most schools are closed, although some operate optional summer school programs. Although this is still the norm, the past decade has seen the growth of an alternative approach: year-round schooling. Children in year-round schools usually are not required to attend school more than 180 days, but these days of attendance occur during a 12-month period rather than during the 9-month, September-to-June traditional-calendar school year. Attendance periods are staggered for different groups of students so that two-thirds to four-fifths of the school's students attend regular classes at any given time, while the remaining students are on vacation.

During the past 10 years, hundreds of schools have implemented year-round educational programs. The most common reason for such a change is a rapid increase in a school or a district's enrollment. By simply changing its calendar, a school may increase its capacity by as much as 50%. Other reasons for a change to a year-round program include the ability to provide attendance options for parents, to provide more remedial opportunities for children, to reduce time spent in re-learning forgotten material, and to serve as a catalyst for changing the curriculum.

This study of a year-round school (YRS) program was conducted for the office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (ASPE) of the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. ASPE began studying year-round schools in 1974, and the first ASPE-sponsored report on YRS programs was issued in May 1975. This first report described the many

models for YRS programs and discussed their major objectives and effects. Later that year a second report, by Abt Associates, documented the history of the YRS movement in the United States and proposed a research design for a larger, more comprehensive study of YRS programs. In 1976, ASPE issued a Request for Proposals (RFP-71-76-OS) reflecting the influence of a research design proposed in the Abt report. The RFP called for a study of the YRS program in the Pajaro Valley Unified School District, located in California about 90 miles south of San Francisco. The contract for the study was awarded to SRI International (then Stanford Research Institute) on June 30, 1976.

The three basic objectives of SRI's study were:

- To assess the economic impact of the year-round school program on the cost of education. Construction costs avoided through year-round use of existing facilities were estimated, and actual operating costs were compared with a simulation of costs that would have been incurred under the traditional school calendar. The impact of the year-round program on a district's annual budget was estimated, and areas in which the year-round schedule resulted in a significant saving, or a significant added expense, were identified.
- To assess the educational impacts of the year-round school program, particularly on educationally disadvantaged and migrant students. Using the results of standardized achievement tests, patterns of achievement of migrant, disadvantaged, and nondisadvantaged students in YRS programs were compared with those of similar students in traditional-calendar school (TCS) programs.
- To assess the social impacts of the year-round school program on parents, teachers, and the community at large. Attitudes of parents whose children were in year-round programs were compared with attitudes of parents whose children attended school on the 9-month schedule. In particular, parents' attitudes about the quality of education, about their children's schools and teachers, and about year-round education were compared. YRS and TCS teachers' attitudes were compared, especially toward year-round school programs. Members of the community at large were surveyed to determine what impacts the change in school calendars has had on recreational facilities, businesses, youth centers, and delinquency.

After a brief description of the Pajaro Valley Unified School District and its YRS program, we summarize our findings and conclusions regarding

the economic, educational, and social impacts of the program during its first 5 years of operation.

The Pajaro Valley Unified School District

The Pajaro Valley Unified School District (PVUSD), covering an area of 155 square miles over portions of three California counties (Santa Cruz, Monterey, and San Benito), operates 16 elementary schools, 3 junior high schools, 2 four-year high schools, a continuation school, and an adult evening school. As of 1976, the district employed 1,044 full-time-equivalent staff, including 536 teachers, 71 certificated nonteachers, and 437 classified personnel. Student enrollment was slightly more than 13,000, of whom 64% were Caucasian, 30% Mexican-American, 5% Oriental, and 1% Black.

Watsonville, with a population of approximately 17,100, is the only incorporated city in the district. PVUSD's financial base is provided primarily by agriculture (truck farming, food processing and canning, and commercial flower growing) and recreation (the resort area around Monterey Bay). The district includes a substantial population of migrant agricultural workers, who reside in the area mainly between April and October.

Between 1965 and 1971, five bond elections and four tax override elections were held in an attempt to meet the educational needs of a growing population. All failed to gain the two-thirds approval needed for passage. As a result, in 1971 almost 15% of the students enrolled in the district were on double sessions or were housed in overcrowded classrooms or in facilities not constructed for classroom use.

As an alternative to expanding its facilities, the district began a "45-15" year-round program at one junior high school and its four feeder elementary schools. Under this system, students attend school for 45 days (9 weeks) and then have a 15-day (3-week) vacation. Students are grouped into four attendance tracks, and vacations are staggered so that three tracks attend school and one track is on vacation at any given time during the year. This program was continued from year to

year and in 1974 the PVUSD Governing Board voted to continue it at the same level as long as the shortage of facilities remained a problem.

PVUSD's involvement in the 1975 study of the YRS movement brought the district to ASPE's attention. ASPE was particularly interested in conducting a comprehensive evaluation of a YRS program in the district because of its substantial population of disadvantaged and migrant students, and especially because it contained both year-round and traditional-calendar schools.

Summary and Conclusions

We studied the effects of year-round schooling through a detailed investigation of the experience of one district, the Pajaro Valley Unified School District in California. We do not believe, however, that our findings are limited to this single district or to year-round schools on the 45-15 schedule. Rather, we believe the results of our study provide insights into the impact of year-round school programs in general and should be of interest to anyone considering either the implementation of a year-round program or its evaluation.

As stated earlier, this study had three basic objectives:

- To assess the economic impact of the YRS program
- To assess the educational impact of the YRS program
- To assess the social impact of the YRS program.

This section summarizes the results of these three assessments and presents our overall conclusions.

The Economic Impact

As was the case in PVUSD, year-round school programs are frequently adopted to alleviate overcrowding in classrooms and to eliminate double sessions without increasing the cost of education. Although it is relatively simple to determine that the YRS program has alleviated overcrowding and eliminated double sessions, it is an extremely complex task to determine whether the cost of education has changed. To overcome

these difficulties, we developed a unique methodology. Previous studies, in either comparing school costs before and after conversion to a YRS program or comparing costs at a year-round school with those of a "matched" traditional-calendar (9-month) school, have improperly compared the costs of a YRS program with those of a nonequivalent TCS program. In our cost analysis, the actual costs incurred by the YRS program are compared with those costs that would be incurred if the same educational services were provided to the same student population by a TCS program. Through this simulation, we are able to determine the impact of the YRS program on capital, operating, and transition costs. Moreover, by varying parameters of the simulation, we are able to identify which district policies have the most direct and substantial impact on costs.

We found that the YRS program reduced PVUSD's annual per-pupil cost of education by 4.1%, producing an annual saving of more than \$150,000. More than 90% of this saving resulted from more efficient use of classrooms and schools. Since the 45-15 year-round schedule increases the maximum student capacity of a school by one-third, overcrowding and double sessions were eliminated without having to construct new schools or classrooms; consequently, \$138,248 per year of construction costs were avoided. Had PVUSD not already had land available on which to build a new school required by the simulated TCS program, the total savings would have exceeded \$170,000 (representing an annual per-pupil saving of 4.7%).

We also found that the YRS program reduced the district's overall operating costs. This finding, which contradicted the results of most previous feasibility and cost studies of YRS programs, was most surprising. In the past, school boards and study commissions often looked only for potential increases in operating costs caused by YRS programs because of, for example, extensions of principals' contracts. Such studies incorrectly determined that a district's operating costs would increase under a YRS program. Our simulation shows that some operating costs are higher under a TCS program and that others are higher under a YRS program. In PVUSD, for example, we found that teacher wages (salary plus fringe

benefits) would have been higher under a TCS program, while administrative costs, such as secretaries' and principals' salaries, were higher under the YRS program. Overall, we found that the annual operating costs of the five year-round schools were more than \$13,000 less under the YRS program than they would have been under a TCS program.

Transition costs--the final cost component--accompany the implementation of any educational change, and it was necessary to determine the exact magnitude of such costs in the implementation of the YRS program in PVUSD. We found that the annualized transition cost was \$826. We included this cost in our overall assessment of the YRS program's impact on the PVUSD budget for illustrative purposes only, because the State of California actually reimbursed PVUSD for the full amount of its transition costs.

We were able to identify several factors that can be controlled by school districts and that could dramatically affect the cost of a YRS program. Foremost among these were the district's policies on variable-length YRS teacher contracts, pupil-teacher staffing ratios, and classroom use. We found that the use of nonstandard teaching contracts in the five year-round schools saved the district just over \$20,000 in teacher salaries and about \$4,000 in benefits; that a small change in pupil-teacher ratio could substantially increase or decrease per-pupil costs; and that savings are substantially reduced when schools operate at less than their full YRS capacity (if all five year-round schools had served their maximum YRS enrollments, the savings in annual capital costs alone would have increased by over \$86,000).

It is difficult to say, based on this study and the flawed studies elsewhere in the literature, precisely how much a YRS program can save a school district. A few studies report increased costs of 1% to 3%; most have found savings of up to 8%. Given that capital costs account for only 15% to 20% of a school's budget and that a YRS program's greatest cost impact is on capital costs, an annual saving of 12% to 15% seems to be the outside limit for YRS program savings. We think a school can reasonably expect to save about 8% of its total annual budget with a

carefully planned YRS program. (PVUSD's YRS program was particularly wasteful in student transportation.) We should reiterate that this is an annual--not a one-time--saving: a YRS program saves money every year it is in operation. Expressed another way, an 8% annual saving means the taxpayers get 1 year of schooling free for every 13 years the YRS program is in operation.

The Educational Impact

YRS programs are rarely implemented to increase student achievement gains. Rather, most frequently they are intended to alleviate overcrowding and to eliminate double sessions without increasing the cost or adversely affecting the quality of education. By this criterion, a YRS program is a success as long as it has no adverse effect on learning. Our study of the educational impacts of the YRS program in PVUSD clearly indicates that it has had no such adverse effect.

To determine how a YRS program affects student achievement, we compared the achievement gains of YRS students with the gains of TCS students. These students came from eight schools: four year-round and two 9-month elementary schools, and one year-round and one 9-month junior high school. From administering the Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills (CTBS) to this longitudinal sample of students in Grades 2, 5, and 7 three times (Fall 1976, Spring 1977, and Fall 1977), we concluded that there was no difference in the size of achievement gains between students in the YRS and TCS programs.

Additional analyses were conducted on several different samples of students, each defined to represent a particular population of interest. We found that disadvantaged students in both the YRS and TCS programs made 12-month gains that were substantially larger than would be expected based on prior research. The disadvantaged students in the YRS program did not suffer a loss in achievement from Spring 1977 to Fall 1977 (a "summer loss"), but--contrary to expectation--neither did the disadvantaged students in the TCS program. Were it not for the unexpectedly large gains made by the TCS students, the gains made by the YRS disadvantaged students

would be large enough to conclude that the YRS program had a dramatic effect on the achievement of disadvantaged students.

The Social Impact

The social impact of any new and innovative educational program must be assessed. This is especially true in the case of the YRS program, since the associated change in vacation schedule can be expected to have substantial impacts beyond the classroom or school. It has been argued that introduction of a YRS program will affect community vacation patterns, child care, recreational programs, local business, and many facets of YRS teachers' and students' lives. We attempted to investigate how the YRS program in PVUSD affects each of these areas by surveying parents, teachers, and members of the community at large.

Parents--We interviewed 943 parents, each of whom had children that were included in our longitudinal sample of students. Approximately half the parents had children in the YRS program and half had children in the TCS program. In general, both sets of parents were equally satisfied with their children's educational progress, social development, and attitudes toward school.

Parents of YRS students thought highly of the program. Over 70% of the YRS parents preferred it to the TCS program, and 55% believed that the YRS program should be expanded to include additional schools. Over 75% of YRS parents believed the program helped to improve school programs, lower juvenile crime, and provided migrants with a better education. Moreover, through investigation of the results of previous PVUSD surveys, we found that the YRS parents' attitudes had gotten progressively more positive from 1972 to 1977.

The YRS program seems to have had very few negative impacts on family life. YRS parents did not report more child care problems than TCS parents, nor did the adjustment to the new vacation schedule pose many problems. Only about 20% of the YRS parents found it more difficult to plan vacations, while almost 40% found it easier.

Most TCS parents also appeared to have accepted the YRS program as the preferred solution to overcrowding. Less than 23% would prefer to build new schools. Although the vast majority of TCS parents preferred the TCS program for their own children, only about 25% thought the YRS program should be reduced to include fewer schools. However, TCS parents who had had no first-hand experience with the YRS program generally held more broadly negative attitudes toward it. Overall, the situation seems to be that TCS parents prefer the TCS program as the "normal" mode of schooling, but the YRS program is the preferred alternative when overcrowding forces a choice. Once parents have direct experience with the YRS program, the majority come to prefer it to the TCS program.

In short, neither program is a panacea. It would be unrealistic to expect that any new program would have the unanimous support of all parents; and, in fact, about 25% of the parents under each program said they would prefer the other program. However, in PVUSD the majority of parents--regardless of which program their children were in--had come to accept the YRS program during its first 5 years of operation.

Teachers--Questionnaires were administered in Spring 1977 to teachers at all eight schools that participated in our study. A total of 156 teachers completed the survey instrument. The teachers were classified into three groups based on their degree of exposure to the YRS program: (1) faculty teaching in a YRS program; (2) faculty teaching in a TCS program at a year-round school, and (3) faculty at a 9-month school.

We found no difference among the three groups in terms of age, sex, training, and teaching experience; and there was no difference in average class size or access to classroom resources. Most teachers expressed a preference for the program they were then teaching in, with vacation schedule apparently being the major factor behind this preference. Teacher attitudes ranged from a general dislike of the YRS program by TCS teachers without direct YRS experience to a broad-based preference of the program by YRS teachers. For example, the majority of YRS teachers considered the YRS program equal or superior to the TCS program

in flexibility of work schedule, problems with student discipline, ease of providing remedial services, time lost in getting students to settle down to work after vacation, tiring effect on students, educational value for the average students and especially for below-average and migrant students, and learning loss over vacation periods. In almost all these items, however, the majority of TCS teachers favored the TCS program. On the negative side, YRS teachers considered coordination of school activities more difficult under the YRS program and felt that teaching in the program was more tiring and difficult than teaching in the TCS program. On balance, though, the positive aspects of the YRS program far outweighed the negative for the YRS teachers.

We found that teachers' acceptance of the YRS program increased through exposure; teachers with the most exposure to the YRS program were the most accepting and positive while teachers with little or no exposure to the YRS program generally had negative attitudes toward it. Moreover, the YRS teachers' attitudes become increasingly more positive over time. The TCS teachers at the year-round schools generally had more positive attitudes toward the YRS program than did teachers at traditional-calendar schools.

Community Survey--Twenty-one persons representing various interest groups were interviewed in an attempt to assess the impact of the YRS program on the community at large. The results of these interviews indicate that the YRS program provides improved vacation opportunities for families whose children attend year-round school, with evidence of a slight trend toward winter vacations. The YRS program appears to have little impact on the business community and, in fact, has not had much effect on the community in general. Most respondents had neither strongly positive nor strongly negative attitudes toward the YRS program. Overall, the program appears to be well accepted by the community, and therefore receives no more attention than the more traditional 9-month program.

Overall Conclusions

We believe the YRS program in PVUSD is an unqualified success. The program has accomplished its primary goal of alleviating overcrowding in classrooms and eliminating double sessions at no increase in the cost of education. In fact, the YRS program has accomplished this goal while reducing the costs of education. At the same time, the program has certainly not adversely affected the educational gains of its participating students. The YRS students make substantial mean achievement gains, with disadvantaged students making especially notable progress. Moreover, the program has overcome the stigma of being "the new kid on the block"; it is now well accepted by parents, teachers, and the community at large. The majority of YRS parents and YRS teachers prefer the 45-15 YRS program to the traditional 9-month program and, in general, have very positive attitudes toward its educational outcomes. In summary, the results of our three assessments were:

- Quite positive with regard to economic impact.
- Neutral (with positive overtones) with regard to educational impact.
- Positive with regard to social impact.

Our study has shown that once parents and teachers have been exposed to the YRS program, they prefer it to the TCS program. The only people who are truly in a position to judge the acceptability of a YRS program are those who best know it: the parents and teachers of children participating in the YRS program. Both these groups now strongly accept and support the program.

However, acceptance did not come all at once; it has grown and increased over time, until now the vast majority of the community assumes that the YRS program will continue to be a part of the PVUSD educational system. A program could have no stronger endorsement.

What can we conclude about year-round schooling in American education from this close look at a YRS program in one school district? First, the YRS program is a very promising solution to overcrowding. It can be instituted quickly, saves money, and probably will be preferred

over the alternatives by parents, teachers, and students. Although school enrollments nationally have declined in recent years, population shifts will result in overcrowded schools in certain areas of the country. A recent survey estimated that 3.6% of all elementary schools in the United States operate on double sessions. The implementation of YRS programs could eliminate this practice. In fact, during the 1976-77 school year, YRS programs could have saved the taxpayers of the nation more than \$100 million in comparison with building classrooms to relieve this current overcrowding.

But a YRS program should not be looked on only as a solution to overcrowding. As we have seen, by making more efficient use of classroom space, year-round schooling saves money. Further, teachers and parents seem to prefer the YRS to the TCS program, mainly because of the opportunity to take family vacations throughout the year. School districts that are not overcrowded may also realize advantages from a YRS program by selling or renting excess buildings or by closing old buildings instead of replacing them. We are not aware of any YRS program that has been implemented for this purpose, but the idea seems promising.

Perhaps the most striking finding to emerge from the study is that, despite the catalog of favorable reactions from YRS parents and teachers, TCS parents and teachers have a low opinion of the YRS program. This finding reinforces the reported experience of many year-round schools that getting people to try the YRS program is a monumental effort. Ingrained habits are hard to overcome, and unquestioning acceptance of the TCS program as the way schooling is meant to be is a well-entrenched habit. Although this study did not consider the questions of how to successfully implement a YRS program, the difference in attitudes between the YRS and TCS parents and teachers points out the importance of this problem. Attempts to start a YRS program can be expected to encounter stiff opposition; but once people have actually lived with the program, they will most likely prefer it.

We believe research is needed to verify our findings. Specifically, we hope that others will further investigate the opportunities for

disadvantaged students in a YRS program. Though our findings regarding the achievement of disadvantaged students are not conclusive, they are very promising. With a large degree of confidence, we feel that the YRS program can be recommended to other districts whose enrollment has exceeded the district's current physical capacity for serving students. The program is likely to save the district a substantial amount of money, is not likely to have adverse effects, and may improve the overall quality of education.